

PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

This is the first in a series of articles about professional status for the Fire and Emergency Services through a common system of training and education. Subsequent articles will discuss Training and Education, A Model for Training and Education; Independent Assessment of Skills and Reciprocity; and, The Future – Where We Go From Here.

In his 1994 Master's Degree Thesis, Chief Ronny Coleman quoted Sir Eyre Massey-Shaw, the Fire Chief of the London Fire Brigade in 1873. When speaking of the people in the fire service 130 years ago, he said, "...that the business [fire], if properly studied and understood, is worth being regarded as a profession."¹

Think about this – you are the fire chief in your community, and your son or daughter expresses a desire to become a physician. They ask if you know what training and education they need. "Sure," you say, "four years of college, four years of medical school, internship, residency, pass the medical boards." "How about an attorney?" "A little different" you say, "Four years of college, three years of law school, pass the Bar exam." And then another of your children asks, "Mom / Dad, I want to be the fire chief, just like you. What do I need to do?"

That's not as easy to answer. It varies from place to place, depending upon the organization, the structure of the department and the governing agency. The process isn't the same wherever you go; frequently it is a slow and uneven process, or one solely based on popularity. Too often, the process frustrates talented men and women; we lose our best and brightest. These are the very people who epitomize the word 'professional' – the ones who have the aptitude and drive to help the department face new challenges.

Professional status is a term that has been bandied about in the Fire and Emergency Services for years. What constitutes "professional" status is in the eye of the beholder. Were we to look at a 'professional' independent of the fire service, to some, it means the performance of a series of skills in a manner that is far above average. To others, a professional is associated with performing skills "full-time," that is to say, for a living. Many feel that the distinguishing characteristics of a profession are years of formal education, approval of an accrediting board and continuing education requirements. More than likely, it is the last statement with which most would agree.

¹ Massey-Shaw, E., *Fire Protection, A Complete Manual Of The Organization, Machinery, Discipline and General Workings Of The Fire Brigade Of London*. C & E Leighton, 1876, p. xiii. From Coleman, Ronny J., *The Evolution of California Fire Service Training and Education*, California State University, Long Beach, Master's Degree Thesis, May 1994, p. 27.

Definitions aside, it is the walk down the main street in any city or town in America that demonstrates who in the community is professional. The physicians and nurses, the architects and engineers, the attorneys and the accountants are among the top professions in any community. What makes them so?

Each has a unique set of knowledge and skills that are independent of a particular organization or place; they are 'portable,' skills and held in equal regard no matter where the person practices. In the process of becoming a professional, there is an accredited and independent testing process that assures competency to the public. Professionals are associated with others in their profession through some formal organization; they typically put service to others as more important than profit; and they assume responsibility for their professional acts. Typically, their profession has some continuing education requirements, and the work is client centered.

Interestingly enough, the Fire and Emergency Services have most of those things. In theory (although not perhaps in current practice), providing emergency services is a 'portable' skill; many professionals move from department to department, from state to state. We have independent testing and assurance of competencies, e.g., NFPA Standards, certification; and in some cases, requirements for continuing education. The Fire and Emergency Services has several professional organizations, and the services delivered are certainly client centered. Profit just isn't in the lexicon; all we concern ourselves with is people.

Then why aren't we given the professional status of physicians and nurses, architects and engineers, and attorneys and accountants? Well, those professions have some things that the Fire and Emergency Services do not yet have; there are a few more steps.

Those six professions (and the others like them) have other substantive tenets; principal among them is a universally recognized system to acquire the knowledge and skills to practice. Their systems of acquiring knowledge are reciprocal among all states. When physicians or lawyers or nurses move from state to state, they may have to present their credentials to the professional board in their new state. They may have to take an exam, or perhaps take some refresher courses – but they don't have to go back to school to learn the basics all over again. You can learn surgery in Texas, and operate in Minnesota. You can attend law school in Massachusetts and appear in court in Washington. You can learn electrical engineering in Montana and design computers in Silicon Valley in California.

But if you are a fire officer, with up-to-date professional training, and you decide to "practice" your profession in another state, you may have to go back to rookie school. That's right, rookie school – learning about classes of fire, types of extinguishers, coupling hose and raising ladders.

It's no one's fault. Right now, there is no one universally recognized and reciprocal system to acquire the knowledge and skills required in the Fire and Emergency Services. None. It's the largest hurdle associated with professional status that we have yet to

overcome. It isn't the only thing – but it is the most significant one right now. The remaining issues will be tackled. It has happened in other professions.

It is interesting to see where our current 'professions' were one hundred years ago. Most people probably don't realize that medical education was haphazard in this country until 1910. In the late 1700's, most physicians apprenticed, and a few attended medical schools in Europe. In the 1800's there were many 'for-profit' schools of medicine in the U.S. that were of questionable quality. It wasn't until 1910 that Abraham Flexner, the American education reformer, wrote *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*. He exposed the inadequacies of most of these private medical schools. Subsequently, the American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges established standards for course content, qualifications of teachers, laboratory facilities, affiliation with teaching hospitals, and licensing of practitioners that survive to this day.²

Many people also don't realize that although Abraham Lincoln was a lawyer, he never went to law school; he apprenticed. Law schools began in this country about 1875. Less than 100 years ago, babies were born at home, delivered by midwives; and some dental care was provided by barbers (yes, barbers!) called "Sanitaries."

Professions have been specialized too. Fifty years ago, pediatricians removed tonsils in their office; today surgeons do this in hospitals. Forty years ago, most nurses were "R.N.'s" with diplomas from three-year nursing schools. Today, higher educated nurses are called Nurse Practitioners, and can diagnose illness, order medical testing and prescribe drugs. Attorneys have specialized practices too – corporate, civil, criminal, personnel and a host of others. This increased specialization is a natural outgrowth of the complexity and increased requirements of practice.

Are the Fire and Emergency Services becoming specialized? You bet. The principal responsibility of the fire and emergency profession is the reduction of community risk – public education, fire prevention, code enforcement, and health and accident risk reduction.

When those prevention activities fail, what once was the fire department is now the emergency response of first and last resort. Citizens know that if they call you, they are going to hear sirens in a few short minutes. You're first on the scene of everything from a heart attack to a car accident, from a hazardous materials release to a trench rescue. Fire, earthquake, flood, hurricane, emergency birth, airplane crash, train derailment or terrorist event; all anyone need do is dial 9-1-1. They're expecting you.

² "Medical Education," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000
<http://encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved

Twenty or thirty years ago, the foundations for professional status for the Fire and Emergency services were laid. Performance standards were established. Colleges and universities recognized the need for formal education and began degree programs. Fire departments began to require certifications, and many began to require degrees or advanced degrees for hiring or promotion. Uncommon thirty years ago, but quite common today, is the hiring of people with professional training and education from outside the organization (instead of through the ranks) to come in to run it. That's the evidence that we're ready to make the next move up the ladder of professions.

One of the principal challenges we have is that aspiring fire service professionals are staggered by the number of independent systems of training and education. There is no 'one way' for the student to determine which is the most appropriate training and/or education. There's no 'one-way' to become the chief. The problem is exacerbated by the reality that there is little chance that one system will recognize that student's performance in another system. Moving from fire department to fire department (or even more difficult – from a fire department in one state to a fire department in another), training or education already received may not be recognized.

The Fire and Emergency Services today is assuredly further along the path to professional status than those in medicine and law were one hundred years ago. We have a body of knowledge, we have standards and we have processes to assure competency (available through the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (NBFSPQ or ProBoard). We have places to acquire professional knowledge, but right now, they are locally based – they aren't a part of a system that everyone recognizes. The missing link is a nationally recognized, reciprocal system of training and education. The good news is that we have all the parts; nothing has to be invented or established. These parts just need to be integrated:

- Training systems (available through local, State and the National Fire Academy).
- Education systems (available through 2-year, 4-year, graduate and National Fire Academy).
- Independent Assessment of Skills (IFSAC and ProBoard).
- Reciprocity among systems of training and education.

PART TWO – TRAINING AND EDUCATION

This is the second in a series of articles about professional status for the Fire and Emergency Services through a system of training and education. In Part One, the need for a system of training for the fire and emergency professional was discussed, and the challenges with our current separate systems were identified. Comparisons among other professions (Medicine, Law, Nursing etc.) and the Fire and Emergency Services were examined. Part Two will discuss the Training and Education systems available to the fire service today – local, state and national programs and the way they compliment and supplement each other.

Training

Efficient training systems are those that identify what they do well and take advantage of the strengths and opportunities provided by other systems to supplement their efforts. Inefficient systems are those that try to be all things to all people, and in doing so, squander resources. The good news is that - as a system of training – fire training is pretty efficient.

The current roles of local, state and national emergency services training generally establish the boundaries for each to prevent costly duplication. Locally, larger departments are capable of training their own people to certain levels of competency. Smaller departments will either seek training from a larger organization, work with other small departments to combine training resources, or seek training from another government agency - either the county or the state training system. Depending on the size of the organization and its needs, local training tends more towards recruit, refresher and ‘hands-on’ training.

State training organizations generally attempt to provide training that is not available locally - ranging from basic recruit training to courses for chief fire officers, from hazardous materials awareness to firefighting strategies at petroleum facilities, and from farm rescue to wildland firefighting. State training organizations vary in their size and capacity, from a few people to a complex, university based system.

At the national level, each State Fire Training System works with the United States Fire Administration’s National Fire Academy (USFA/NFA) to deliver USFA/NFA curriculum. The USFA/NFA develops and delivers the kinds of training that aren’t available at the local or state level. Community Risk Reduction, Public Education, Codes and Standards, Detection and Suppression Systems, Executive Development, Terrorism, Command and Control of Incidents, Strategic Planning, Information Systems and Budgeting are among the USFA/NFA’s curriculum areas.

This system isn’t something that is planned for the future – this is the system as it exists today.

At the national level, most of you would probably be surprised to learn that the USFA/NFA does the least amount of training on its Emmitsburg campus - about 8,000 students per year. Most of our training occurs off-campus through the cooperative efforts of State and Metropolitan sized fire training organizations. In 2002, The USFA/NFA trained over 87,000 Fire and Emergency Services personnel in off-campus course deliveries, self-study courses, CD based simulation training and other alternative deliveries through its virtual campus (see <http://www.training.fema.gov>).

Six-day and two-day USFA/NFA courses are provided to individuals locally through the cooperation of individual state training systems. Each year, the USFA/NFA provides nine two-day courses to every State. The State selects the nine courses from a menu of thirty-seven courses, and tells the USFA/NFA where they'd like the courses delivered. The course materials and instructors are provided at no cost to the State.

Through the organization of State training systems and metropolitan-size fire departments (called the Training Resource and Data Exchange network – TRADE), the USFA/NFA also provides the instructors, course materials, site support, assistance, and a small student stipend for the delivery of 3 six-day courses in each of the ten federal regions. The States and metros in that region select the courses from a menu of twelve, and decide the locations for delivery. Again, the USFA/NFA provides the upfront costs for materials, instructors and facility rental if appropriate.

On some selected new two-day courses, and others that have been field tested, the USFA/NFA will provide Train-the Trainer courses, providing all course materials and student manuals for local delivery. These are available through individual state training systems.

Information about any of the USFA/NFA programs mentioned above can be found in our catalog or on our web page: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/fire-service/nfa.cfm>

Education

Locally, many colleges and universities provide two and four-year degree programs in fire science and/or administration. Over the past several years, a few Master's degree programs have emerged. For those who, for reasons of proximity or time, are unable to attend a local college, the USFA/NFA works with seven schools throughout the country to provide four-year degrees via the Degrees at a Distance Program; there are no resident course requirements for these courses.

Those who have attended two and four-year programs (currently there are 222 two-year and 26 four-year programs in the US)³ are usually people who are “in-service,” that is to say, are going to school part-time and working a full-time job. These individuals may be career or volunteer, but most don’t enjoy the luxury of full-time academia – it is a considerable sacrifice to them and their families.

The titles of “fire” degrees vary – from Fire Technology all the way to Public Administration with a concentration in Fire Administration. Some degrees are called Fire Science, Fire Administration or Fire Department Management, but the disparity creates misunderstanding among employers and other schools of higher education. Everyone understands what a Medical, Law or Nursing degree means. Few understand what a “Fire” degree means. This makes it difficult for other schools and employers to assess the education or skill of prospective students or employees. Hence, transfers of credits between schools (and true professional salaries) are elusive.

Since 1986, the USFA/NFA has been administering the Degrees at a Distance Program in cooperation with seven universities around the country. These “DDP Schools”⁴ use distance-learning technologies to permit students to earn their bachelor degrees. The program enrolls about 1000 students from all over the country, with approximately 100 students graduating each year. These schools use standardized courses (including course title), syllabi, and content provided by the USFA/NFA.

Over the past four years, the USFA/NFA has sought to expand these kinds of educational opportunities for degree seeking students, while at the same time seeking to strengthen the meaning and understanding of the value of the degree through its Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) initiative.

Working with over 100 two and four-year colleges, the FESHE National Fire Science Curriculum Committee curriculum committee has developed a model core and non-core curriculum, courses, syllabi and content for associate and bachelor degree programs. It is a *model*, not a requirement; but the work has established a direction for college programs that establishes a base for the transferability of credits (you don’t have to start all over again), and ease of understanding as to what a “Fire” degree means. Many current college programs have committed to following the model as revisions in their programs are made.

³ Sturtevant, Thomas B. “A Study of Undergraduate Fire Service Degree Programs in the United States – Fall 2000,” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, May, 2001.

⁴ See the USFA/NFA web page <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fire-service/nfa/higher-ed/he.shtml> for more information

From an education point of view, model course descriptions, courses, syllabi and content increases the understanding of what a “Fire” degree means for students, schools and employers. It creates an atmosphere in which schools will be more comfortable accepting transfer credits from other degree programs, and encourages the writing of new textbooks specifically for college courses. As more Fire Science Associate Degree Programs adopt these model courses, we will see future leaders of the fire service having had the same courses and content as part of their professional development and credentialing... just like doctors, lawyers, nurses and other professions.

What is even more critical to the process is textbooks. All textbook publishers in the fire field have been invited to participate in the FESHE conferences and workshops. Some have already agreed to write textbooks to conform to the new model curricula and others have expressed interest in doing so. Following the model curricula gives publishers the guidance and structure to develop their texts, and the larger audiences that will purchase them.

Recently, the USFA/NFA has agreed to release its thirteen courses in the DDP program to other four-year college degree programs. The requirement for the release is that the college sign an agreement with the State Fire training system in their state. If it does, the USFA/NFA will release the thirteen third and fourth year fire college courses to the bachelor degree program. Although not required, we encourage both partners to agree that the college will accept certain certifications for college credit, and that State Fire Training systems will accept some college credit toward certification requirements.

To further encourage that effort, representatives of State fire training systems convened in Emmitsburg to “crosswalk” the thirteen DDP courses to the ProQual standards. Both the colleges and the State fire training systems now have a basis to exchange that credit.

PART THREE – A MODEL FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION

This is the third in a series of articles about professional status for the Fire and Emergency Services through a system of training and education. In Part One, the need for a system of training for the fire and emergency professional was discussed, and the challenges with our current separate systems were identified. Comparisons among other professions (Medicine, Law, Nursing etc.) and the Fire and Emergency Services were examined. Part Two discussed the Training and Education systems available to the fire service today – local, state and national programs and the way they compliment and supplement each other. Part Three will discuss the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education effort (FESHE), the development of model two and four-year degree curricula, syllabi and content, and the release of the thirteen USFA/NFA courses into four-year bachelor degree programs.

What follows is a discussion about what many national fire service leaders believe should be the future direction of professional development for the fire and emergency services. This document should serve as a starting point for discussions between State fire service training, certification, and higher education leaders, fire science coordinators and their advisory committees, fire academy instructors and their students, fire chiefs and their staffs, and any others who have an interest in fire service professional development.

The Problem: A Fragmented System of Professional Development

Have you or someone you know:

- taken fire science courses at a two-year college;
 - taken courses at State and local fire training academies and through the National Fire Academy (NFA);
 - achieved various levels of certification;
- AND**
- all combined, these achievements are "all over the map", meaning none of them evolved in a coherent and planned way?

Most firefighters and officers have earned college credits and training certificates since their first day in the fire service. However, this professional development is usually uncoordinated and fragmented, resulting in duplications of effort and inefficiencies for students. Lack of coordination between fire-related training, higher education, and certification contributes to this problem.

Collaboration and coordination is needed between all service providers responsible for fire and emergency services' professional development. Each has a major role to play. This report presents the recommendations that have evolved over the past four annual Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) conferences. Combined, these products and outcomes represent a new strategic approach to professional development. They will help move the fire and emergency services from a technical occupation to a full-fledged profession similar to physicians, nurses, lawyers, and architects, who, unlike

fire service personnel, have common course requirements within their respective degree programs.

There are several major tenets on which a "profession" is built, including reciprocity for practicing in different States (with an exam), universally accepted standards of practice, and a professional development model, among others. The work accomplished during the FESHE conferences addresses one tenet--professional development.

The Role of FESHE Conferences

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) hosts the annual FESHE conference on its campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland. These conferences are a combination of presentations, problem solving, and consensus-building sessions which result in higher education-related products or recommendations for national adoption.

At the 2000 conference, two panel discussions were conducted . The first panel included fire service leaders representing national fire service organizations, and the second was comprised of State directors of fire service training. Both panels raised issues that formed the basis for these national recommendations, including the need for:

- degree programs that teach critical thinking skills by requiring significant numbers of general education, rather than mostly fire science, courses;
- appropriate recognition of certification for academic credit and vice versa;
- associate degree programs that are transferable to baccalaureate programs;
- a model fire science curriculum at the associate level that universally standardizes what students learn and facilitates the application of these courses towards certification goals; and
- collaboration between fire service certification and training agencies and academic fire programs.

Fire and Emergency Services Professional Development Model

The professional development model is one product finalized at the 2002 FESHE IV conference. It is **not** a promotion model addressing credentials; rather, it is an experience-based model that recommends an efficient path for fire service professional development supported by collaboration between fire-related training, higher education, and certification providers. The model recommends what these providers' respective roles should be and how they should coordinate their programs.



Suggested Roles and Responsibilities

	Training	Higher Education
Learning Outcomes	Provide students with practical applications that give them the "ability to do the work", using skills- or competency-based approaches.	Provide graduates with cognitive skills that give them the "ability to manage."
Firefighter I and II; Special Certification, and Fire Officer I - IV	Deliver courses that directly support Firefighter I and II, special certifications, and Fire Officer I-IV standards, as appropriate.	Provide "officer development" and deliver courses that address Fire Officer I - IV certification. At the executive officer's level, a master's degree in public administration (or related disciplines) and applied training in strategic policymaking are desirable professional preparations.
Risk-Management Oriented	<p>Direct all relevant and applicable curricula towards "risk management" because the fire service's response and mitigation missions have expanded greatly over the years to include all disasters, natural and manmade.</p> <p>Address "all hazards" rather than solely fire-related incidents. This coordination of training and higher education provides a professional development path for transforming chief fire officers into "all-risk managers."</p>	
Standards "Crosswalks"	<p>Certification agencies identify the standards addressed by the fire science courses offered within their States, particularly those in the model curricula. Fire science publishers for the model associate courses identify standards addressed in their textbooks. NFA standards "crosswalks" for its resident, field, and baccalaureate courses are available on the USFA web page http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fire-service/nfa-abt7.cfm. Fire-related training, higher education, and certification service providers collaborate to promote students' eligibility to apply academic credits toward appropriate standards and vice versa.</p>	

Model Curriculum

Associate Degree Programs

Another result of the 2000 FESHE conference was the model fire science associate degree curriculum. The FESHE attendees identified six core associate-level courses in the model curriculum, including:

- *Building Construction for Fire Protection*
- *Fire Behavior and Combustion*
- *Fire Prevention*
- *Fire Protection Hydraulics and Water Supply*
- *Fire Protection Systems*
- *Principles of Emergency Services*

In 2001, the National Fire Science Curriculum Committee (NFSCC) was formed to develop standard titles, descriptions, outcomes, and outlines for each of the six core courses. In 2002, the FESHE IV conference attendees approved the model courses and outlines. The major publishers of fire-related textbooks are committed to writing texts for some, or all, of these courses.

It was recommended that all fire science associate degree programs require these courses as the "theoretical core" on which their major is based. The course outlines address the need for a uniformity of curriculum and content among the fire science courses within the United States' two-year programs. Many schools already offer these courses in their programs, while others are in the process of adopting them. Once adopted, these model courses address the need for problem-free student transfers between schools. Likewise, they promote crosswalks for those who apply their academic coursework toward satisfaction of the national qualification standards necessary for firefighter certifications and degrees.

The committee also developed similar outlines for other courses that are commonly offered in fire science programs. If a school offers any of these "non-core" courses, it is suggested these outlines be adopted, as well. The non-core courses are:

- *Fire Administration I*
- *Occupational Health and Safety*
- *Legal Aspects*
- *Hazardous Materials Chemistry*
- *Strategy and Tactics*
- *Fire Investigation I*
- *Fire Investigation II*

Baccalaureate Degree Programs

At FESHE IV, NFA announced it would release its 13-course upper-level Degrees at a Distance Program (DDP) curriculum to accredited baccalaureate degree programs which have signed agreements with their State's fire service training agency. DDP will remain as NFA's delivery system for the 13 courses; however, release to other schools enables the formation of model curriculum at this level. The courses are:

- *Advanced Fire Administration*
- *Analytical Approaches to Public Fire Protection*
- *Applications of Fire Research*
- *Community and the Fire Threat*
- *Disaster and Fire Defense Planning*
- *Fire Dynamics*
- *Fire Prevention Organization and Management*
- *Fire Protection Structures and Systems Design*
- *Fire-Related Human Behavior*
- *Incendiary Fire Analysis and Investigation*
- *Managerial Issues in Hazardous Materials*
- *Personnel Management for the Fire Service*
- *Political and Legal Foundations of Fire Protection*

A National System for Fire-Related Higher Education

With model lower-level (associate) curriculum outlines developed and established upper-level (baccalaureate) courses available, the major components are in place to move towards a national system for fire-related higher education.

Most core and non-core courses line up with baccalaureate courses of similar content, thus preparing associate degree graduates for their bachelor degree studies.

Lower-level Course

Corresponding Upper-level Course

Fire Behavior & Combustion

Fire Dynamics

Fire Prevention

Fire Prevention Organization & Management

Fire Protection Hydraulics and Water Supply/Fire Protection Systems

Fire Protection Structures and Systems Design

Hazardous Materials Chemistry

Managerial Issues in Hazardous Materials

Strategy and Tactics

Disaster and Fire Defense Planning

Fire Administration I

Advanced Fire Administration

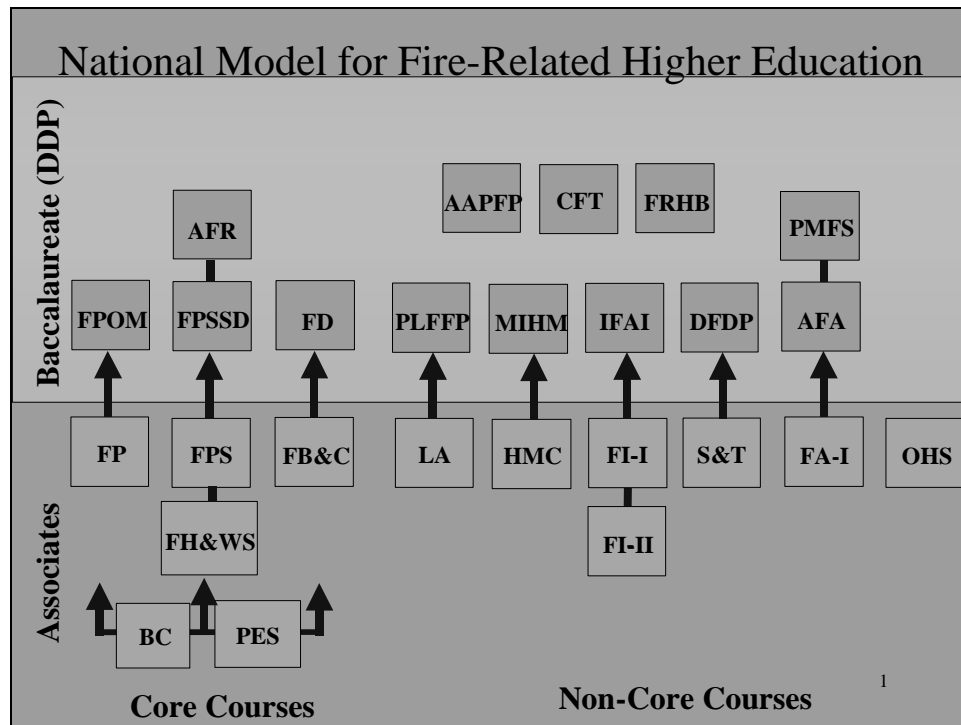
Legal Aspects

Political and Legal Foundations of Fire Protection

Fire Investigation I & II

Incendiary Fire Analysis and Investigation

This national system for fire-related higher education is important because, as with other professions, a theoretical core of academic courses should be a prerequisite for entering these fields. As more schools adopt these curricula, the fire and emergency services moves towards becoming a full-fledged profession.



A Call For Collaboration

There are no easy paths to uniting the "big three" of the fire and emergency services professional development system. The relationships between the providers of training, certification, and higher education are varied across the country. In most States, levels of cooperation among the three range from excellent to nonexistent.

Some exceptional State models of cooperation do exist, however, including California and Oregon. The models' similarities demonstrate that:

- partnerships can solve training, education, and turf battles by bringing together stakeholders in some formal or informal organization or consortium; and
- through cooperation, a professional development delivery system that works for the State can be created and maintained.

Who are the stakeholders from which this leadership must emanate? They are the State offices responsible for fire service training and certification, the fire-related degree programs, and the State organizations representing fire chiefs, firefighters, volunteers, instructors, and other vital constituencies. We need many leaders at all levels. At the Federal level, the USFA can bring the national stakeholders together to build momentum for this effort.

An effective model for a State professional development "summit" was presented at the FESHE IV conference. It provides a plan of action for Washington State, including stakeholder involvement and consensus strategies.

What might be the elements of a State professional development plan? In addition to spelling out who should be responsible for learning at each level of certification, it recommends:

- the extent to which certifications should be granted academic credit;
- the extent to which academic credit should be accepted towards satisfaction of standards;
- the numbers and types of fire-related and general education courses; and
- the types of degrees--Associate of Arts/Associate of Science transferable to baccalaureate programs versus terminal or nontransferable degrees.

Only the State and local leaders can make this happen. We urge you to contact the fire and emergency services leaders in your State and urge them to begin the difficult path of transforming this Nation's fire service's professional development into a national system.

PART FOUR – COMBINING THE SYSTEMS: INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS / RECIPROCITY

This is the fourth in a series of articles about professional status for the Fire and Emergency Services through a system of training and education. In Part One, the need for a system of training for the fire and emergency professional was discussed, and the challenges with our current separate systems were identified. Comparisons among other professions (Medicine, Law, Nursing etc.) and the Fire and Emergency Services were examined. Part Two discussed the Training and Education systems available to the fire service today – local, state and national programs and the way they compliment and supplement each other. Part Three discussed the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education effort (FESHE), the development of model two and four-year degree curricula, syllabi and content, and the release of the thirteen USFA/NFA courses into four-year bachelor degree programs. Part Four will discuss the Independent Assessment of Skills and Reciprocity.

Currently, the principal parts of a system of professional development exist. Each local, State, higher education and federal training organization, in their own way, has been working toward the same goal – the training and education of the men and women in the Fire and Emergency Services toward professional status.

The most practical approach to accomplishing the next step – assembling the training and education into one professional and reciprocal system – is a voluntary one. It should be a cooperative effort that will provide benefits to both the training and education systems and the students they serve. It is what other professions have done in the past. It is what the Fire and Emergency Services need to do now.

Independent Assessment of Skills

Part of that system must include some process by which individuals are certified as competent to practice. Assessment of knowledge, skills and abilities is completed after a particular course of study. In the medical profession, the State Medical Association may be the agency, not the medical school. In most states, attorneys must “pass the Bar” to qualify to practice law, and the “Bar Exam” is independent of the law school. Nursing, engineering, architecture and accounting are other examples of professions with certifying agencies that are independent of the professional school. The assessment of individual knowledge, skills and abilities in every profession is independent of the school.

Fortunately for us, the fire service already has certifying agencies, the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) and the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (NBFSPQ or ProBoard). Certifications are awarded to individuals because they have demonstrated competency, and the certifying agency assures that competency to the public. The more familiar certifications to those in the Fire and Emergency Services are Firefighter I, II, III; Fire Officer I, II, III, IV; and Fire

Instructor I, II. Other professional associations offer certification in other related fields – fire investigation, fire inspector and emergency medical technician are but a few.

Another important part of the equation is the Committee on Professional Development in the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). Committee members are representatives of the professional practitioners. For years, the IAFC has worked on a number of initiatives to credential fire chiefs (the Chief Fire Officer Designation - CFOD) and fire departments (Commission on Fire Accreditation International - CFAI) to recognize personal and organizational achievement, and assure some level of competency to the public.

Reciprocity

With the descriptions of the systems that the fire service enjoys - training education and independent assessment, the next logical step is to combine these parts into one system of professional development for the fire service that is universally recognized and reciprocal.

The first step was to strengthen reciprocity by having all of the State fire training systems participate as full partners in the USFA/NFA system of training and education. Full partner means more than what they and we are currently doing; it means that your state training system is the USFA/NFA in your state. As such, they are required to hire USFA/NFA instructors to teach our courses, issue our certificates, and register the students they train in our student database. When a student takes four USFA/NFA courses in one state, and three in another, there will be one central place that the student can go for the transcripts of that training. The USFA/NFA is the catalyst and the repository.

States may now deliver six-day or two-day NFA courses, and three of our most popular two-week residential courses: Fire / Arson Investigation, Interpersonal Dynamics in Fire Service Organizations and Strategic Management of Change. These courses are in addition to the current deliveries already available to them in our six and two day programs. This program is called Enfranchisement. States are the NFA in their state; therefore, they may hire our instructors to teach our courses. Each State is eligible to apply for a \$25,000 grant to deliver these extra courses.

Beginning in 2000, State Training Systems were authorized to deliver USFA/NFA courses. Many of these courses currently have college credit award recommendations associated with them. To maintain that credit recommendation, the American Council on Education annually reviews our courses, methodologies and instructor qualifications. In order to sustain the credit recommendations, States are required to deliver USFA/NFA courses using NFA qualified instructors.

This is a very important point. State fire training systems may deliver NFA courses. It then follows that State fire training systems must also *accept* the training people received from the NFA in either our resident or field courses. That is one of the foundations of

reciprocity. If you take an NFA course anywhere in the country, it is accepted anywhere in the country.

Moreover, through the great work of the North American Fire Training Directors Association (NAFTD), all of the NFA courses have been “cross-walked” to the ProQual standards. This was an NAFTD peer review, not something decided in an ivory tower. Now, a student who takes an NFA course gets two “professional status” benefits – college credit, and some of the elements required for professional certification.

Endorsing State Developed Courses into the National Fire Academy Curriculum

The second way to strengthen reciprocity is to recognize that State fire training systems have developed courses that meet very high quality standards, and at the same time, meet local need. Throughout the nation, there are needs for professional training that are not national in scope. For example, the New York City Fire Department may need a course on subway fires. The State of Kansas may have need for a farm rescue course. It’s pretty obvious that FDNY will probably never need a farm rescue course, and it will be a while before the State of Kansas has its own subway system. There has got to be a way to meet those needs.

Again, working with the State fire training systems, the USFA/NFA not only addressed a way that individual regions can meet their needs, but has done it in a way that also strengthens reciprocity. The USFA/NFA has given State training systems a way to include their top-level courses into the national curriculum. To accomplish this, we’ve formed a partnership with the State Training directors and agreed upon the criteria and standards for selection and approval of these courses. If the course meets the criteria, then it becomes a part of the national curriculum. These state developed courses, which are peer-reviewed and approved, are called Endorsed courses. Students who pass an Endorsed course may receive USFA/NFA certificates and be registered in our database. One of the key benefits is that an Endorsed course is taught by local instructors.

A third way to strengthen reciprocity and increase the number of courses delivered is to give States the opportunity to deliver train-the-trainer courses for any of the thirty-seven two-day Direct Delivery USFA/NFA courses. Those local trainers, working through the State system, may issue our certificates and register their students in our database.

States may issue NFA certificates on any of the 34 NFA hand-off courses delivered by local instructors when they register the student in our database.

States may deliver any of these courses - USFA/NFA developed courses (enfranchised), or approved state courses (endorsed) at a state training facility, a regional training facility, a college or university, or a local fire department – it is their choice.

To give the State training systems the opportunity to deliver this increased training, each has the opportunity to apply for a \$25,000 grant for the sole purpose of delivering these above mentioned courses.

What are the benefits of a common system of training and education and reciprocity to the fire and emergency services?

The foremost benefit to the Fire and Emergency Services is that it is the next logical step in establishing the professional status of the men and women in the Fire and Emergency Services. There is already a recognized body of professional knowledge. We now are beginning a universal system that allows everyone equal access to that professional knowledge.

The second principal benefit is that more people can now participate in USFA/NFA courses. We know that everyone cannot attend our classes in Emmitsburg. Enfranchisement permits States to deliver our courses locally at local training sites, using our instructors, with full college credit recommendation.

The third benefit is the reduction in course development costs. Currently, fire departments fifty miles away from each other are spending time, effort and money to develop the very same course. They have no idea that someone so close is working just as hard, spending just as much money and facing the same development obstacles they are. With an endorsement system available, departments can contact the state to find out what courses are already available before they decide to begin developing a course. No training system in this country has all of the people and money they need to develop courses – this solves a lot of those development problems.

The fourth benefit is reciprocity. Each State is now a part of a national system, empowered to issue USFA/NFA certificates for training and education provided. It therefore logically follows that States would accept certificates as evidence of training received in some other jurisdiction. Those basics are already built into the system; it simply saves training time and money. No one has to repeat a course because they moved; no department has to re-train a person in courses they've already had. It is similar to the status enjoyed by physicians, nurses, attorneys, engineers, architects, accountants and others.

The fifth benefit is that it increases the number of training courses available to State and local training systems, either through Enfranchisement, Endorsement or increased Train-the-Trainer courses.

The sixth benefit is that colleges and universities are a part of the system, building an environment which colleges can award credit for certification received, and that State fire training systems may accept some college credit toward certification requirements. Following the model curriculum, students should be able to transfer college credit between systems, and employers would have a firm understanding of the knowledge, skills and abilities of those who hold degrees in the fire field.

The seventh benefit is that the training and education model follows a logical sequence, endorsed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs Professional Development Committee's Officer Development Handbook.

What are the challenges?

The State Fire Training Directors and the USFA/NFA staff have worked diligently for three years on this concept, overcoming obstacles, negotiating agreements, and identifying improvements. With the concept approved and endorsed by the National Fire Academy Board of Visitors, and the Co-Chair representatives of the State and Local fire training group (TRADE), the initial phases of the program have begun.

In 2000, states were notified that \$25,000 grants which could be used to deliver USFA/NFA courses were available, and since then all have applied and used those funds. The program allowing State Training Systems to deliver USFA/NFA developed courses (Enfranchisement) was also begun in 2000, and on the same day, the agreement that established the criteria and process to endorse state courses into the national curricula was announced. All of the funding and administrative pieces are in place.

Our next challenge is one of participation and cooperation – encouraging local training systems and colleges to cooperate and participate in the system. That is what we need all of you to help us do.

PART FIVE: THE FUTURE: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

This is the fifth in a series of articles about professional status for the Fire and Emergency Services through a system of training and education. In Part One, the need for a system of training for the fire and emergency professional was discussed, and the challenges with our current separate systems were identified. Comparisons among other professions (Medicine, Law, Nursing etc.) and the Fire and Emergency Services were examined. Part Two discussed the Training and Education systems available to the fire service today – local, state and national programs and the way they compliment and supplement each other. Part Three discussed the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education effort (FESHE), the development of model two and four-year degree curricula, syllabi and content, and the release of the thirteen USFA/NFA courses into four-year bachelor degree programs. Part Four discussed the Independent Assessment of Skills and Reciprocity. Part Five discusses the future.

Any trip, from a leisurely drive to a cross-country begins with “where you are.” You can’t go anywhere, or find any place, unless you know where you are.

Rather than try to describe the future, it might be helpful to describe how the system of training and education helps individuals at particular times in their Fire and Emergency Services career – determine where they are.

Understand that each of us has our own goals and ambitions. These articles may have described your situation, or someone you know. There is no “one best way;” each of us must decide for ourselves the paths we choose to take. These examples are meant to expose some of the potential opportunities for someone in the Fire and Emergency Services; but it may not suit a specific individual’s needs.

Right now, when someone begins a career in the Fire and Emergency Services, they are faced with professional development choices that have consequences that the individual may not fully appreciate. In some cases, some particular aspect of their job influences the individual; in others, a colleague, close friend or officer may influence them. In any event, the individual has several paths to choose from; but in many cases, they may see only one or two.

One path leads toward training and certification in particular disciplines. Of course, the one that is familiar to all is Firefighter I, II and III. Other disciplines in the training and certification include inspection, training, fire officer and a host of others. Depending upon the level of certification desired, these certifications can take a long time to complete. Depending upon the department and the personnel selection system, these certifications may lead to promotion to a higher rank.

Another path leads toward a degree - Associate, Bachelor and graduate. This path involves years of college coursework, research and writing. Formal academic pursuits typically occur outside the fire department on the student’s own time and often at his or

her own cost. Like certification, education may or may not increase the likelihood of promotion, depending upon the department's personnel practices.

A third path deals solely with the department's promotion practices. An individual seeks whichever path leads to promotion and decides that whatever the pursuit, the outcome must achieve advancement. In most departments, this involves some form of competitive examination, from multiple-choice questions to an assessment center. Any of these promotion processes may include an interview with the Chief, City Manager or Mayor.

Up until now, these paths were viewed as mutually exclusive, that is to say, an individual chose one over the others in order to achieve his or her goal. With a system of training and education, this isn't the case.

With an agreement between a State Fire Training system and a college in their state, as a firefighter moves through the certification processes, there is an opportunity to receive some college credit for certification (and the training behind that certification). Again, depending upon the agreement between the State Fire Training system and a college, a student who takes a college course may receive some credit towards certification. As an example, if someone took a Management 101 course in college, they may receive some credit toward certification in Fire Officer I.

Since State Fire training systems may issue National Fire Academy certificates for the NFA courses they deliver, it follows that they must also accept them. It doesn't make much sense to award something if you don't accept it. This is one step toward reciprocity. Hopefully, before long, all States will accept certification awarded by another state as many do now.

At the national level, and in cooperation with the American Council on Education, most of the National Fire Academy courses receive college credit recommendation. It is up to the local college as to whether they accept this recommendation, but most do. On the certification side, a panel of State and local fire academy representatives convened in Emmitsburg to "cross-walk" the NFA courses with the applicable standards. You can go to our web site, <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/fire-service/nfa-abt7.cfm> to review the crosswalks. Look at a course and you'll find the standards it meets. Type in a standard and it will identify which NFA courses include that standard. It is up to the local jurisdiction as to whether they choose to accept this, but it is a fully peer-reviewed process accepted by many.

With model degree programs and syllabi developed by the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education (FESHE) initiative, students will have more opportunity to transfer model course credits between colleges. Once established, employers will have a better understanding of the education underlying the degree.

With concurrence by the International Association of Fire Chiefs Professional Development Committee, this same training and education path is the one they've chosen to be used for chief fire officer development.

Simply stated, we already have a common system for certification, a common system for education, and the ability to have them work together toward one integrated system that leads to professional status. It is a path one can identify and choose to follow. No one must chose between one path and another. They are complimentary.

There is an already established system to assess competency and assure competence to the public – IFSAC and ProBoard.

The Future

This series of articles began with the observation that most of us can answer the question, “How do you become a physician, a nurse, an attorney, an engineer or an accountant?” For perhaps the first time, we’ll soon have the one answer to the question, “How do you become a fire chief?”

As we continue on this path well traveled by other professions, other elements of professionalism will emerge. One is a research journal, refereed by peer scholars. Another will probably be some level of continuing education requirements. But the final step, the end of the road, the time at which we will become a profession like all the others will be the time that a professional (career or volunteer) firefighter or officer can have his or her professional status rescinded independent of the employer. That’s when you’ll know. That’s when the light goes on.

The path isn’t easy, and it won’t be quick enough for some. To achieve the professional status enjoyed by others, we must do more than demand it. The path taken by the other professions is the model that we must follow. It works.

The time is right. The agreements have been made. The elements and systems are aligned; it is up to us to control and advance this profession of ours. No one but Shakespeare could have said it better:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.⁵

⁵ Julius Caesar, IV, iii, 217. Brutus to Cassius arguing that the enemy should be met at Phillippi.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What happens if my organization, department or college won't participate?

You have several options. One is to have them read this article. If anyone of them would like additional information, they may contact their State Fire training system. The program is voluntary; no one will be coerced into participation. However, the benefits far outweigh the costs.

2. Is the USFA/NFA trying to establish national standards?

No. The fire service professional standards are already established. This is a complimentary, organized system to deliver training and education that has reciprocity as its foundation and professional status as its goal.

3. What about colleges and universities? How do they fit into the system?

Colleges and State Fire service training systems are among the critical elements of professional education. In June, 2002 over 100 representatives from colleges across the nation convened in Emmitsburg to develop a model curriculum for fire science programs. The USFA/NFA has been working with these schools of higher education to encourage them to:

- Develop a model curriculum
- Seek ways, when and where appropriate, to award college credit for certification training.
- Seek partnerships with State training systems to explore ways for State training systems to include college courses as part of certification requirements.

4. What about the IFSAC and ProBoard?

Nothing in this plan changes what these organizations do; in fact, this process actually strengthens their standing. With a national, reciprocal system of training and education, these organizations become the outside agency that assures standards competency; the medical, law or nursing board (if you will) for the Fire and Emergency Services.